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ABSTRACT

There are few racial or urban/rural differences in public attitudes toward agriculture and government agricultural policies. The Farming in American Life Study, a collaborative effort by 14 land grant institutions in the South and Midwest, gathered 3,239 completed questionnaires from a national stratified random sample for a completion rate of 46 percent. Statistical weighting made respondent categories representative of national proportions. In general, perceptions about agriculture were favorable, with no salient differences by race or residence. However, minority group members were significantly more likely to support government food programs than majority group members. Differences on many issues tend to be greater between urban and rural minorities than between urban and rural whites or between the races. Compared to rural minorities, urban minorities were less likely to support government price supports and the preservation of the family farm, and more likely to support farm ownership by the farm operator, payment of higher taxes by corporate farms, and government policies associated with low food prices. Several contradictory results suggest a lack of understanding by all groups of the relationships among food prices, prices paid to the farmer, food programs, and farm support programs. The report includes 8 data tables and 19 references. (SV)

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PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF AGRICULTURE: THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT, SUPPORT FOR THE FAMILY FARM AND SUPPORT OF DOMESTIC FOOD PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

The analysis presented in this paper is based on the Farming in American Life Study, a collaborative effort of 14 Land Grant Institutions in the South and Midwest coordinated by the USDA Cooperative State Research Service. A stratified random sample nationwide resulted in 3239 completed questionnaires. Descriptive statistics are used to describe and test the extent to which minority group perceptions of agriculture and agricultural policy are statistically different from majority group views. In addition, the residence differential is examined because minorities are disproportionately more likely to live in metropolitan areas, hence relatively few ties with agricultural production activities. As such, minorities and persons in metropolitan areas may be less sympathetic and may have less realistic perceptions of agriculture.

In general, the data revealed that perceptions about agriculture were favorable, with no salient differences by race and residence. However, minority group members were significantly more likely to support government food programs than majority group members. Finally, the discussion considers implications for agricultural policy and the future of farming in the country.

INTRODUCTION:

Since 1920, there has been a continuing and precipitious drop in the number of farm operators in the U. S., particularly among blacks and other minorities. The number of black farmers dropped from 1920 peak of 925,710 to a low of 33,250 by 1982, a 96 percent decline (Banks, 1986:1). The corresponding percentage decline for white farm operators was 73 percent. In recent years, however, because of a low base, the percentage decline has dampened somewhat. For example, between 1978 and 1982, the number of black farm operators has dropped by 42 percent compared

to a 27 percent drop for white farm operators. The average black-operated farm has only about 100 acres, compared with the 440-acre national average.

According to a USDA task force, farm numbers have decreased most "...among those farms with the weakest economic base which could not compete with the attraction of the cities, could least afford the conversion of mechanization, could not provide an adequate livelihood for its families from farm earnings and could not, for various reasons, supplement farm earnings with nonfarm sources of income. The majority of black farmers were in this group" (USDA, 1983).

Today, less than 2 percent of the U. S. farm population is black. Most black farm operators (94 percent) are concentrated in the South, almost half operate less than 50 acres, earn less than $2,500 annually and tend to be operated by an older and less educated individual (Banks, 1985:V). Coley (1978) points out that it is very doubtful, according to the views of many American experts, that blacks will exist in coming years in American agriculture. Given a choice, it appears that most blacks would get out of agriculture which they consider an inferior occupation (Schultz, 1967). It is the opinion of Ploski & Williams (1971) that blacks everywhere, as a rule, are not inclined to pursue a career in agriculture. He states that the major contributor to this disenchantment is the misery suffered by blacks on cotton and tobacco plantations.

Thus, the U. S. Black population has relatively fewer ties and unfavorable experiences with food production activities and, thus may be expected to have a characteristic pattern of

attitudes, beliefs and perceptions toward farm and farm policy.

The purpose of this paper is to examine perceptions of agriculture and agricultural policy as function of race and residence (rural vs. urban). We examine attitudes towards the family farm food programs, food programs and the role of government in agriculture. Based on systematic patterns of differences in the data, an attempt will be made to assess that extent to which minorities are supportive of agriculture and/or to what extent educational programs are needed to provide an embellished, yet realistic, picture of agriculture.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Perception is the process whereby one gathers and interprets information. Perceptions do not occur in a vacuum. Instead, individuals uses prior information that has been incorporated into their cognitive models for the processing of new information about an activity or phenomenon (Vander Zanden, 1984: 33-34). Thus, people tend to organize their perceptions along somewhat different dimensions. Different experiences and/or exposure to different situations lead to different perceptions. Anyone of multiple worlds - vastly different visions - may emerge, depending on which "stimuli" we "register," the linkages we make among stimuli, and our interpretations of the stimuli. For example, perceptions about the food and agricultural system probably results from a host of factors such as personal knowledge of the farmers, the increased media attention given to the farm crisis, the economic structure of the community, knowledge (or lack of) of farming, recipient of food coupons, an

individual's background and so forth. The accuracy of this information or the weights attached to background factors notwithstanding, perceptions are formed. W. I. Thomas contended that "if human beings define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (1931:189). That is, a person's definition or interpretation - whether right or wrong - will influence his behavior. Strongly negative perceptions have resulted in tragedies of slavery, warfare and genocide.

Perceptions influence policy primarily through the ballot box. A policy may be adopted to correct a supposed defect in the system or it may be adopted to establish an entirely new institution, or new goods and services which do not occur naturally.

Boehm (1981) puts it this way:

"...perceptions are quite real. They are powerful. They have deep-seated roots and are perpetuated with bits and pieces of facts. Such perceptions will continue to carry a great deal of weight during the 1981 farm bill debate and...in farm policy debates for some time to come."

Perceptions about agriculture are derived from man's innate concept of what is good and bad and from these perceptions evolves one's position on policy matters (Talbot, 1970). The goals for which a particular policy is adopted vary in relation to the type of value system in place. Problems arise due to conflicting goals. This involves reducing the gains of one group for the purpose of increasing the gains of another group.

Theoretically, perceptions are couched in the symbolic interactionism. Symbolic Interactionism has ancient intellectual roots, but its main proponents were William James (1842-1910), John Dewey (1859-1952), Charles H. Cooley (1864-1929), George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) and W. I. Thomas (1863-1947). Symbolic

Interactionism did not gain wide influence until the late 1960's. But as the approach gained popularity, it fragmented, resulting in a number of varieties. However, Blumer (1969:2) captures the essential basic postulates: (1) "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them"; (2) "the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows"; and (3) "these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters."

Thus, as alluded to above, symbolic interactionism advances the tenet that people's interpretations and perceptions are shaped by persons or stimuli around them. Thus, given the misery endured by blacks on cotton and tobacco plantations, the corresponding stigma attached to farming as an undesirable way of life, and that few blacks have achieved success in agriculture, black ambivalence or negative attitudes toward agriculture are understandable.

Studies of attitudes and occupational aspirations have shown that black college students clearly avoid careers in production agriculture (Molnar and Dunkelberger, 1981). Minority students were particularly less likely to expect a farm career even though proportionately more black students in the study possessed the background characteristics traditionally associated with farming. For many black agricultural students with childhood experiences on small farms and first-hand knowledge of the hardships and uncertainty of farm life, farming is not viewed as a desirable career choice. The usual agents of socialization to farming

operate to shift black youth toward nonfarm careers within the context of production agriculture (Molnar and Salter, 1982). Further, Banks (1986)lends support to the findings of Molnar, Dunkelberger and Salter by stating that there are no current indications of a significant offsetting replacement of young black farmers.

In a corollary manner, the symbolic interactionist perspective would lend support to the hypothesis that rural residents tend to have more favorable, and probably more realistic, attitudes towards farming and agriculture because of the everyday experiences of these individuals. Agriculture, forestry, and mining as well as low-technology manufacturing dominate rural labor markets. In addition, recent research has shown strong support for agrarian principles among rural residents (Buttel and Flinn, 1975; Molnar, 1987). Agrarianism underscores the primary of agriculture as an occupation, staking a special place for agriculture as a fundamental national resource. Molnar (1987:3) reports that agrarian values fueled social movements among farmers in response to economic conditions and perceived exploitation by railroads and other institutions. Agrarian values became a regional theme of life in the South and a basis for hardy internal variations, agrarianism emphasized an appeal to unity among all farmers.

Given the hypotheses that blacks and urban residents tend to have less favorable attitudes towards agriculture, there is also a joint effect: blacks are more likely to live in urban areas. At the beginning of this century, over half of the whites in this country lived in urban areas, while only one third of all blacks

lived in urban areas. Today, however, a higher percentage of blacks live in the city than whites (Tweeten, 1979). Migration from the rural setting to cities by blacks due to adverse conditions on the farm can lead to the assumption that blacks would not be supportive of policies favorable to farmers.

The urban environment in which most blacks find themselves may affect their perceptions more than their past rural background. Houthakker (1970) contends that, today, people from the metropolitan area no longer find agriculture to be an occupation with which they have any "personal affinity." Talbot & Wiggins (1969) clarify the situation even more when they state, "urban families like cheap food and the vote is in the city," implying, that city people may no longer be as willing to support agriculture if they feel it will be at their own expense.

DATA AND METHOD:

The data for this analysis were obtained from a stratified random sample of persons in the United States, purchased from a national marketing firm (Donnelly Marketing, Nevado, Iowa). The population from which the sample was drawn consisted of a computer-merged list of residential telephone subscribers and automobile owners. The sample frame should be representative of nearly all households in the U. S., although households which do not have a telephone or register an automobile would be excluded (most households with unlisted telephones would be included). The list is updated on a yearly basis, so, some loss is to be expected due to household geographic mobility.

The sample consisted of eight strata. Four thousand households were drawn nationwide; 1500 households were drawn from Michigan; and 750 households were drawn from each of the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and South Carolina. The respondents from each state have been assigned appropriate weights to represent the proportion of that state's population in the national population.

In January 1986, a questionnaire and a cover letter were mailed to each household in the sample. Employing a modified Dillman approach, the mailing of two additional questionnaires and three reminder postcards resulted in a completion rate of 46 percent, (N=3239).

SAMPLE REPRESENTATIVENESS:

Owing to a 46 percent return rate, a statistical weighting procedure was used to enhance the representativeness of the sample. Statistical weighting restores proportional representation of subgroups or categories of respondents that are over - or under-represented because of disproportionate sampling in the seven states as well as the vagaries of nonresponse, sampling error, or other sources of bias. Frankel (1983:48) outlines that statistical properties of weighted data. Songuist and Dunkelberg (1977:201) also outline the procedures to be used in weighting the data.

To correct for the disproportionate sampling in the states in order to ensure adequate numbers for analysis, the weighting factor was equal to the percent that the state represents in the U. S. population divided by the percent in the sample. For

example, North Carolina is 2.59 percent of the U. S. and 9.2 of the sample. Thus, the initial weight for North Carolina respondents is 2.59/9.2 = .282, as they are overrepresented in the national data.

Similarly, the sample was also weighted for age, sex, race, education and income differentials. The resulting weighted sample profile is shown in Table 1. The sample statistics now more closely resemble the population parameters. The weighting procedure produces a marked improvement in sample representativeness.

MEASUREMENT OF ANALYSIS:

Opinions about government support for agriculture, the family farm, and food programs were obtained by with a fixed format response scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". For our analysis, the responses were combined into either "agree", "disagree" and "undecided". The questions are then analyzed in terms of percentage differences in agreement between races for those respondents with opinions. Residence (urban vs. rural) is used as a control variable. The questions are also analyzed in terms of differences between the races on the degree to which they had or did not have a opinion. The respondents were also asked questions to determine their background and extent of knowledge about farms and farming.

Race is based on self-identification. Two categories are used in this analysis: (1) Minority (blacks, Hispanics, Asians and American Indians); and (2) White. Blacks constituted 5.8

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONS BY SELECTED PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS: UNWEIGHTED AND WEIGHTED 1986 SURVEY RESULTS AND U. S. TOTAL

Characteristic	Percent			
	Weighted Sample	Unweighted Sample	U. S. Total	Difference (Weighted-U.S.)
Sex				
Male	40.8	67.6	48.6	-7.8
Female	59.2	32.4	51.4	7.8
Race				
Black	5.4	5.2	11.7	-6.3
White	89.3	91.4	86.0	3.3
Other	5.3	.4	2.3	
Age				
34 years and younger	35.1	25.9	41.2	-6.1
35 to 64 years	37.1	56.7	43.1	-6.0
65 and older	27.7	17.4	15.7	12.0
Education				
Some high school or less	26.8	14.1	18.3	8.5
High school graduate	38.2	25.9	49.8	-11.6
Some college	15.8	27.1	15.7	.1
College graduate	19.1	32.9	16.2	2.9
Family Income				
Less than $10,000	34.2	8.5	25.4	8.8
$10,000 to $14,999	15.8	10.8	14.4	1.4
$15,000 to $24,999	22.8	24.3	23.7	-.9
$25 00 and over	27.3	56.5	36.5	-10.1
Place of Residence				
Large metropolitan city	18.7	18.9	12.5	6.2
Medium or small city	41.0	43.3	44.1	-3.1
Town, village, or in the country	33.7	31.8	40.9	-7.2
Farm or ranch	6.5	6.0	2.5	4.0
(Number)	(3,239)	(3,239)		

percent of the sample while the other minorities constituted 5.9 percent of the sample. Thus, white respondents made up 88.3 percent of the sample. Rural resident was defined operationally as one who lived in a place with a population of 50,000 persons or less. Employing this definition, nearly 50 percent of the respondents lived in rural areas compared to 37 percent that lived in urban areas. Thirteen percent of the sample did not provide an answer to the residence question; thus, they were excluded from the analysis.

FINDINGS:

Support for Government Involvement in Agriculture

Responses to questions concerning the role of government in agriculture are presented in Tables 2 and 3. In general, both whites and minorities did not believe that farmers either get too much money from government programs or receive more than their fair share of government benefits. There was only a 7 percent difference between whites and minorities on farmers getting too much money from government programs with whites slightly more in agreement that farmers received too much money.

On these first two issues, the data in Table 3 reveal that the differences between the races are less than the differences between urban and rural minorities with more rural minorities feeling that farmers get too much money and more than their share. The differences between white urban and rural populations were minor by comparison. In fact, the rural minority responses were more similar to white responses, both rural and urban than to minority urban responses.

TABLE 2

SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN AGRICULTURE BY RACE

	Percent Agreement		
	Minority	White	Difference
1. Farmers get too much money for government programs	12.5	19.6	-7.1
2. Farmers get more than their fair share of government benefits	17.3	16.2	1.1
3. Farmers should compete in a free market without government support	25.7	33.7	-8
4. Government should help as many farmers own their farmland	65.3	60.5	4.8
5. Government should help young people get started in farming	69.6	70.2	-.6
6. Government should have a policy to insure the survival of the family farm	70.3	66.7	3.6
7. Government should have a policy to protect prime farmland	79.4	82.1	-2.7
8. Government should guarantee a minimum price to farmers for their produce	59.1	52.4	6.7
9. Government should pay farmers to practice soil conservation	36.7	40.6	-3.9
N=	342	2838	

TABLE 3

SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN AGRICULTURE BY RACE, RESIDENCE

	Percent Agreement					
	Minority			White		
	Urban	Rural	Diff.	Urban	Rural	Diff.
1. Farmers get too much money for government programs	12.8	20.4	-7.6	19.9	20.5	-.6
2. Farmers get more than their fair share of government benefits	13.6	19.4	-5.8	15.5	17.8	-2.3
3. Farmers should compete in a free market without government support	24.5	52.1	-27.6	27.1	59.1	-32
4. Government should help as many farmers own their farmland	66.8	78.6	-11.8	62.8	56.8	6
5. Government should help young people get started in farming	72.2	76.8	-4.6	71.8	66.4	5.4
6. Government should have a policy to insure the survival of the family	60.8	73.9	-13.1	66.9	64.5	2.4
7. Government should have a policy to protect prime farmland	81.2	85.5	-4.3	82.1	83.1	-1
8. Government should guarantee a minimum	48.1	79.4	-31.3	51.7	49.8	1.9
9. Government should pay farmers to practice soil conservation	47.3	34.2	13.1	37.9	38.8	-.9
N =	171	96		1041	1511	

Item 3 dealt with the issue of free markets in which neither whites or minorities felt that farmers should compete in a free market without government support. The difference between the races was 8 percent with whites feeling more inclined to allow farmers to compete in an unsubsidized market environment, However, the differences between the urban and rural sector of both racial categories were substantially greater than the differences between races in favor of the free market approach. In fact, the majority of both rural minorities (52.1%) and rural whites (59.1%) were in favor of farmers competing in a free market. This may be somewhat of a surprise and one could draw the conclusion that rural people were less sympathetic to the farmer.

However, in terms of support for policies favorable to farmers, one must be cognizant of the fact that policies that a non-farmer may view as favorable to farmers may not be perceived as favorable by the farmers themselves. The frequency distribution of farmer's perceptions of government farm policies displayed in Table 4 indicates a great deal of dispersion within the ranks of farmers. In fact, the farmers' responses to Item 3 indicates that the majority - 46 verses 32 percent - were in favor of a free market without government support. Table 4 also reveals another unexpected result in that farmers prefer that the government should not pay them for practicing soil conservation. These conservation programs allow farmers to rest their most unproductive land and receive income for a minimal input.

Going back to Item 3 in Table 2, it seems that both white and minority rural respondents are more similar to farmer

TABLE 4

FARMERS PERCEPTIONS OF AGRICULTURE[1]

	% Agree	% Disagree	% Undecided
1. Farmers get too much government money	28	44	28
2. Farmers get more than their share of benefits	20	52	28
3. Free market without government support	46	32	22
4. Government should assist to own farmland	53	31	17
5. Government should help young get started	59	30	13
6. Government policy to assure family farm survival	68	18	14
7. Government policy to protect farmland	81	8	11
8. Government should guarantee farmers minimum price	58	6	16
9. Government should pay farmers to conserve soil	35	47	18

N = 286; 8.8 percent of the sample

opinions than are their urban counterparts, These differences can be attributed to a lack of familiarity with the problem than a more indepth analysis of the data may reveal. There was a large block of both white and minority urban respondents that had "no-opinion" on the subject -35.65 percent and 42.6 percent respectively - revealing a possible lack of knowledge of the issue. When the responses of those that had an opinion are compared, the differences between the farm and non-farm respondents are more similar with 45.3 percent of the non-whites and 52.8 percent of the whites agreeing that farmers should compete in a free market system.

On Items 4 - 7, both whites and minorities seem to believe that the government should help farmers own their farmland, help young people get started in farming, ensure that survival of the family farm, and have a policy to protect prime farmland. The differences between the races were minimal. However, the differences within racial categories between urban and rural are more pronounced, especially among minorities. Although the differences between the racial categories are less than 5 percent on all four issues, the difference between rural and urban minorities was almost 12 percent on the issue of government support for farm ownership and more than 13 percent on the issue of farm survival. In both cases, urban minorities are less enthusiastic about government support than are their rural counterparts. Again, what is highlighted is that the difference within racial categories my be more important than the difference between the categories, which on the one hand indicates a more homogenous set of attitudes between the races

than between the rural and urban dichotomies.

Although both racial categories responded in favor of the government guaranteeing a minimum price to farmers, minorities were somewhat - a difference of 6.7 percent - more in favor of such supports than were whites. However, when one examines the minority respondents by residence (Table 3), one finds that whereas the majority of rural minorities were in support of price supports for farmers (79.4%), a smaller proportion of the urban minorities (48.1%) were in favor of such price supports. The response to this question by the rural minorities seems somewhat contradictory given their response to Item 3 above (the majority of rural minorities were in favor of a free market system). This issue, again, suggests that the difference within racial categories may be more than the difference between them.

The response pattern of differences is continued in Item 9, the issue of conservation. Although, neither the minorities or the whites were in favor of paying a farmer for conservation, the whites were slightly more in favor with the real differences occurring within the minority group than across the racial categories. Urban minorities were substantially (13.1%) more in favor of paying farmers to conserve land than were rural minorities. The differences could be due to either a more long run foresight in terms of future productivity or just a better knowledge of how the conservation programs really work. Rural minorities may feel that the system is abused by larger farmers who have more land to divert and can afford more of the other inputs to boost production on the remaining acreage, whereas the smaller farmer may not be able to afford such reductions. At any

rate, the differences are noted.

The analysis to this point demonstrates striking similarities between racial categories across issues dealing with government support for agriculture. The most glaring differences seem to occur within the minority community between the rural and urban populations. The rural minorities on some issues seem to have more of the free market non-government intervention approach than the urban minorities, but on the other hand want the government to help farmers own their land, ensure the survival of the family farm and guarantee a minimum price to farmers for their products.

Support for the Family Farm

Responses to questions concerning support for the family farm are presented in Tables 5 and 6. In general, most whites and minorities are generally sympathetic to the idea of the family farm. Both whites and minorities do not feel that farms are too large (Item 1), while most feel that the family farm should be preserved (Item 3), owned by the person who operates it (Item 2) and that the government should have a special policy to ensure that the family farm survive. However, responses to Items 4 - 7, although answered very similarly by the races, do not present a clear pattern of support or non-support for the family farm when the issues of food prices and corporate farming are introduced.

The differences between the races on the support for the family farm are somewhat wider than they were in the area of government involvement. For instance, there was not a difference

TABLE 5

SUPPORT FOR THE FAMILY FARM BY RACE

	Percent Agreement		
	Minority	White	Difference
1. Most farms today are too large	20.8	21.7	-.9
2. Farmland should be owned by the person who operates it	63.7	54.8	8.9
3. The family farm must be preserved it is a vital part of our heritage	70.6	83.4	-12.8
4. Obtaining greater food efficiency in food production is more important than perserving the family farm	30.2	21.4	8.8
5. Most consumers would be willing to have food prices raised to help preserve the family farm	26.9	23.9	3
6. Corporate farms should pay more taxes than family farms.	69.9	66.4	3.5
7. Family farms should be supported even if it means higher food prices	32.5	42.2	-9.7
8. Government should have a special policy to ensure that family farm survive	86.3	83.0	3.3
N=	342	2848	

TABLE 6

SUPPORT FOR THE FAMILY FARM BY RACE, RESIDENCE

	Percent Agreement					
	Minority			White		
	Urban	Rural	Diff.	Urban	Rural	Diff.
1. Most farms today are too large	18.7	23.3	-4.6	20.9	21.4	-.5
2. Farmland should be owned by the person who operates it	82.9	43.3	39.6	56.1	53.1	3
3. The family farm must be preserved it is a vital part of our heritage	65.5	77.7	-12.2	81.1	85.3	-4.2
4. Obtaining greater food efficiency in food production is more important than preserving the family farm	31.1	41.5	-10.4	22.2	19.3	2.9
5. Most consumers would be willing to have food prices raised to help preserve the family farm	21.2	41.9	-20.7	21.1	24.5	-3.4
6. Corporate farms should pay more taxes than family farms.	78.3	69.1	9.2	65.1	68.8	-3.7
7. Family farms should be supported even if it means higher food prices	31.2	45.6	-14.4	41.2	42.1	-.9
8. Government should have a special policy to ensure that family farm survive	80.9	89.4	-8.5	84.6	79.6	5
N=	171	96		1014	1511	

greater than 7.1 percent on any issue in relation to government involvement (Table 1), while whites and minorities differed by more than 8 percent on four out of the eight items concerning support for the family farm (Table 5). The items showing the greatest differences were Items 3 (-12.8 percent), 7 (-9.7 percent), 3 (8.9 percent) and 4 (8.8 percent).

Whites felt more strongly that the family farm must be preserved than did minorities (Item 3), but minorities had a greater propensity to believe that farmland should be owned by the person who operates it. Although the majority of whites and minorities did not feel that the family farm should be supported even if it meant higher food prices, more whites than minorities were in agreement with such a policy (Item 7). In this same vein, more minorities compared to whites felt that greater efficiency in food production was more important than perserving the family farm (Item 4).

The response to these items would indicate that minorities are more concerned than whites about the price of food even if it may be at the expense of the family farm. The differences were in degree only with no complete opinion reversals by the majority of the respondents when race is held constant.

The data in Table 6 reveal that the differences in responses between urban and rural minorities were greater than the differences within the white population or the differences between races (Table 5). The greatest difference in opinion within the majority population concerned the ownership of farmland. The vast majority of urban minorities felt that farmland should be owned by the operator (82.0 percent), while a

minority of rural non-whites felt this way (43.3 percent). The differences in response could reflect the ownership patterns prevalent among minority farmers, where a large proportion are either sharecroppers or are involved in some type of rental arrangement. Such type of arrangements may be preferred by the limited capital resource operator.

Great differences within the minority population are also observed in Items 3, 5 and 7, where the urban minorities are less concerned with the survival of the family farm than they are about food prices. Interestingly, Item 6 reveals that although both rural and urban minorities agreed that corporate farms should be supported even at the expense of higher food prices, more urban minorities were in agreement compared to rural minorities. The response to Item 4 along with the response to Item 6 may reveal that urban minorities may feel that corporate farms may be more efficient than family farms in terms of the cost of food to the consumer.

In the area of support for the family farm, the differences of opinions within the minority community are greater than the differences across racial categories or within the white community. These differences may be attributable to both myth and reality about the state of our agricultural system; however, it seems that rural minorities, and both urban whites and rural whites may be on somewhat opposing sides of the fence in reference to agricultural policy. The urban minority in general can be assumed to favor policies that will ensure low food prices with a greater trust in corporate America in delivering the goods than they do in the family farm system. The historical plight of

TABLE 7

SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT FOOD PROGRAMS BY RACE

		Minority %	Whites %	Difference %
1. Food stamps for poor people	Increased	51.7	26.5	25.2
	Decreased	6.2	21.2	-15.0
	Eliminated	0.9	5.5	-4.6
2. Free or low cost milk for school children	Increased	61.9	40.9	21
	Decreased	3.5	3.9	-.4
	Eliminated	1.2	3.2	-2
3. School lunches for poor children	Increased	64.6	43.3	21.3
	Decreased	3.7	5.0	-1.3
	Eliminated	1.3	2.1	-.8
4. Surplus food distributed free to poor people in the United States	Increased	73.1	56.4	16.7
	Decreased	1.6	4.4	-2.8
	Eliminated	2.1	2.2	-.1
5. Free or low-cost food for hungrey people in poor countries	Increased	48.5	28.1	20.4
	Decreased	14.2	22.8	-8.6
	Eliminated	3.4	14.2	10.8
		342	2848	

TABLE 8

SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT FOOD PROGRAMS BY RACE, RESIDENCE

		Minority			Whites		
		Urban	Rural	Diff.	Urban	Rural	Diff.
		%	%	%	%	%	%
1. Food stamps for poor people	Increased	49.2	52.7	-3.5	21.7	26.9	-5.2
	Decreased	5.0	9.1	-4.1	22.5	20.6	1.9
	Eliminated	1.0	1.5	-.5	7.4	4.7	-.7
2. Free or low-cost milk for school children	Increased	62.5	55.7	6.8	40.7	40.4	.3
	Decreased	5.2	2.9	2.3	3.4	4.0	-.6
	Eliminated	1.8	0.9	.9	2.2	4.3	2.1
3. School lunches for poor children	Increased	69.5	68.9	.6	42.9	43.1	-.2
	Decreased	5.4	3.1	2.3	4.7	4.6	.1
	Eliminated	2.2	0.7	1.5	1.9	2.6	-.7
4. Surplus food distribution free to poor people in the United States	Increased	74.5	80.2	5.7	53.6	58.5	-4.9
	Decreased	2.4	1.1	1.3	4.7	4.0	.7
	Eliminated	3.5	.8	2.7	2.7	2.3	.4
5. Free or low-cost food for hungrey people in poor countries	Increased	57.3	52.2	5.1	25.8	28.6	-2.8
	Decreased	11.1	20.2	-9.1	22.7	23.7	-1.0
	Eliminated	2.6	5.7	-3.1	11.2	16.1	-4.9
		171	96		1014	1511	

minorities in rural areas, faced with low wages and insensitivity to their quest for economic fulfillment, compared to the mild relief felt in the corporate world of urban America could weigh heavily in the color of the lenses through which urban minorities view agricultural policy.

Support for Government Food Programs

Tables 7 and 8 display the responses to the items on support for government food programs. Although whites and minorities held very similar views concerning family farms and government farm support programs, greater differences are revealed on specific food program issues. Minorities were much more in favor of increasing all five programs presented in Table 7 than were whites. Substantially more minorities than whites preferred increases in Food Stamps (51.7 vs 26.5 percent), milk for school children (61.9 vs 40.9 percent), school lunches for poor children (64.6 vs 43.3 percent), free surplus food to poor in the United States (73.1 vs 56.4 percent) and low cost food for hungry people in poor countries 48.5 vs 28.1 percent).

Unlike the previous issues, the difference within racial categories when compared by residence was much less than the differences across racial categories (Table 8). Therefore, clearer lines can be drawn between the races on the issues of food programs than on the previous two issues. In other words, distribution or consumption issues rather than production issues distinguish racial opinions.

The differences between racial groups ranged from a low of 16.7 percent on Item 4 to a high of 25.2 percent on Item 1. The differences between the races was enough to expose complete

reversals in opinions on Items 1, 2 and 3, showing a great insensitivity of the whites to programs that ensure an adequate diet to the poor and their children. This seems somewhat contradictory to the previous acclamations of whites to support programs to preserve the farm. Food programs to the poor increases the utilization, demand, and price of the very commodities that are produced by the farm families that whites are willing to support through other government programs. Again, this lack of understanding of the relationship between consumption programs and farm prices among whites could be similar to the lack of understanding among urban minorities of the relation between farm support programs and cheap food. At any rate, there seems to be ample room for increased education of the public on the relationship between food consumption and production policies.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

The point at issue in this paper has been to examine perceptions of agriculture and agricultural policy as a function of race and residence. We examined attitudes towards the role of government in agriculture, support for the family farm and support for government food programs. Our approach was grounded theoretically in symbolic interactionism and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

In general, minorities are more concerned about the availability of cheap food than one who produces the food. Although the agrarian philosophy and the independent family farm producer may be of concern to whites, minorities are more concerned about

cheap food, but would support the family farm idea as long as it did not mean increasing food prices or reducing food programs to the poor. The white population may still have connections through family ties with the farm and may even envision retiring on their own tract of land, wishing to preserve a tradition that they may continue to benefit from. However, the urban minority, having given up such dreams of farm ownership and aristocratic ideals of control, are more concerned with the availability of cheap food and have a less hostile view of the corporate control of food production than their white neighbors.

If the advocates of the family farm system want the support of minorities, it seems that they must convince the minorities, not of the agrarian ideas of independence and self-reliance, but that the family farm system can guarantee them cheap food and an efficient food production system. Although food programs for the poor may be looked upon by whites as "hand-outs", it is possible that farm subsidies may be seen in the same light by the urban minorities. There is a link between consumption demand stimulated by food programs for the poor and the price of commodities received by the farmer.

Therefore, since this research reveals that whites seem to want to preserve the family farm with a bit more fervor than urban minorities, whites and farm families may have to pay more attention to the demands of the urban minorities for cheap food and greater economic participation. However, at this point, whites seem more against the programs that help the urban poor, than are the urban minorities against the programs that help farm families which are overwhelmingly white.

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